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To America: Personal Reflections of an Historian

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apply to all small wars, or even to all counterinsurgencies.

A related if less telling criticism is that the three selected conflicts are clearly grouped at the more robust end of the small-wars spectrum. The size of a war may be measured by intensity (number of deaths over a given time), duration (amount of time over which killing occurs), or scale (number of total deaths). Other units of measure could be fiscal cost, percentage of armed forces engaged, or the extent to which a state's vital national interests are at risk. None of the wars Merom looks at were quick, low-cost affairs. Perhaps they should not be included in the "small war" category at all.

That said, this book is not without merit. It certainly suggests several areas for future research. Of these, one of the more intriguing would be the use of locally recruited military forces as a means to achieve victory in counterinsurgencies and other forms of small wars without generating adverse domestic public opinion. Such forces have traditionally had key roles in small wars throughout history. Merom's findings suggest that the need for such units may be bigger than ever.

When it comes to the specific cases of Vietnam, Algeria, and Lebanon, Merom's scholarship and argument are convincing. Public opinion and war fatigue, aversion to casualties, and refusal to endorse certain methods of warfare clearly impacted national decision making in these cases. Merom demonstrates that forces unleashed in the various domestic political systems examined in this study had a profound impact on war prosecution and termination. Any scholar wishing to understand these conflicts in deeper detail should read the appropriate chapters of this book. Again, it should be noted that it is impossible not to see similarities between these cases and current U.S. operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The potential for such domestically driven forces to impact national security policy is clearly something that should be of interest to any modern political-military leader or scholar. For, as this review is being published, U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan are determinedly attempting to defeat counterinsurgencies while trying to avoid initiating the forces Merom examines. So while Merom's work does not provide the key to the problem of counterinsurgency, it does seem to provide at least a significant piece of the puzzle.

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Ambrose, Stephen E. *To America: Personal Reflections of an Historian.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003. 288pp. $24

The United States is the richest and most powerful country in the world. Yet over two hundred years ago it began as thirteen colonies at the edge of a continental wilderness. Stephen Ambrose, an eminent historian and skilled writer, has used this short, readable book to explain how the United States made this amazing transformation. He attributes its success as a nation to the American spirit.

The American spirit originated with the founding fathers and was further developed by presidents Andrew Jackson, Ulysses S. Grant, Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt, and Dwight D. Eisenhower.

It is based on the notions of justice, equality, and the rule of law and fundamental fairness, and embraces the ability to recognize and correct the ills of society.

At home the American spirit has been the driving force behind the U.S. Constitution, civil rights, women's rights, the rights of Native Americans, the denouncing of imperialism, the end of racial segregation, and concern for the environment. Abroad, it has brought democracy to former enemies.

This slim, modest volume is an autobiography as well as an interesting summary of Ambrose's thesis. He displays an admirable open-mindedness and willingness to change his position in light of changing circumstances, although he frequently disagrees with the academic orthodoxy, and with refreshing candor.

Ambrose's life as a historian was truly remarkable. He was the author of a sterling biography of Eisenhower and the editor of his papers, as well as the biographer of Richard M. Nixon. From 1969 to 1970 he held the Ernest J. King Chair of Maritime History at the Naval War College, and in his later years Ambrose was the founder of the National D-Day Museum.

Ambrose was a first-class writer. His list of published works is truly remarkable. Primarily an expert on World War II, he had a tremendous respect for junior officers and enlisted personnel, for whom he had developed great admiration.

Shortly before his untimely death in 2002, Ambrose ended this compelling volume with these words: "That [American] Spirit got us through September 11, 2001 and it will see us through the future."

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